

LETTERS FROM READERS

The Katyn Massacre

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

G. F. Hudson's thoughtful analysis of evidence in "Who is Guilty of the Katyn Massacre?" (COMMENTARY, March 1952) points to the conclusion that the 11,000 Polish officers were murdered by the Russians. The thousands of letters, all dated before May 1940, which were found on the 4,500 corpses discovered, appear to be conclusive, for the Nazis could not have been in that area before July 1941. The Russian allegation that the bodies were exhumed by the Germans and all documents of later date removed would constitute a logical rebuttal, but this contention implies deeds so diabolical and so revolting to normal human conceptions that it is understandably rejected as incredible. Certain facts, however, have been overlooked by Mr. Hudson or were unknown to him and the authors of the three books he cites. An objective verdict would require these facts to be taken into account before a conclusion is reached.

It has been established beyond doubt that special German SS extermination squads called *Einsatzgruppen* were active on the entire Eastern front in liquidating all those considered racially or politically undesirable. In a Nuremberg war crimes trial, at which I was chief prosecutor, SS General Ohlendorf and twenty-one other *Einsatzgruppen* leaders were convicted of murdering over one million innocent people in the Eastern territories. The top secret official German reports sent by the *Einsatz* units to Gestapo Headquarters in Berlin, in which their activities were minutely described, were captured by the U. S. Army. These reports proved that *Einsatz* units murdered hundreds of thousands of Jews, officials, Communists, and other real or fancied opponents of Nazism in hundreds of towns and villages surrounding the Katyn area.

In the fall of 1942, when German retreat was imminent, the chief of the Gestapo, Mueller, sent an order to the *Einsatzgruppen* directing them to wipe out traces of the mass graves of persons they had executed. A special commando, "1005," was activated for this purpose and trained in exhuming and burning corpses.

Until the Germans were driven out at the end of 1943 the disinterring of bodies of *Einsatzgruppen* victims and the destruction of the mass graves was in progress. Even the top secret reports were silent about this fantastic activity, which is confirmed, however, by the court testimony and sworn affidavits of defendant SS Colonel Blobel who personally transmitted the order, and an SS man, Ruebe, who helped carry it out, as well as the testimony of Rudolph Hoess, commander of Auschwitz, which provided some of the working parties.

Worthy of note perhaps is the fact that in September 1942 the order to eliminate the traces of the mass murders they had committed was transmitted to SS Brigadier General Thomas, *Einsatzgruppe C* commander. Before October 23, 1942, *Einsatzgruppe C* moved into Starobjelsk. This was one of the three towns named by Mr. Hudson in which the Russians had interned the Polish officers before the spring of 1940 and where they were last seen alive. What was *Einsatzgruppe C* doing there? When it is recognized that the Nazis were desperately trying to conceal their monstrous crimes and were exhuming bodies buried long before, it becomes less incredible that they might have removed certain documents or deliberately planted others.

It would appear that there are some additional points which may require clarification before conclusive judgment about Katyn can be rendered.

BENJAMIN B. FERENCZ

Nuremberg, Germany

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I do not think Mr. Ferencz's account of the activities of the SS *Einsatzgruppen* is really relevant to the Katyn case. The purpose of the SS in exhuming and burning corpses of the victims of their mass murders was to remove the evidence of their crimes or at least to prevent identification. The reburial of corpses after faking of documentary evidence on them is quite a different matter from burning them. The question is whether such an operation could have been performed on more than 4,000 corpses under the conditions given, without leaving any traces detectable by medico-legal experts. I never suggested that the Soviet ver-

sion should be rejected because it involved deeds too revolting to be credible; I am well aware that no deed was too horrible for the SS. But if the Polish Red Cross doctors, Mackiewicz and others, are to be believed, the condition of the corpses when dug up in April and May 1943 was such as to preclude absolutely the exhumation and reburial alleged to have taken place in March. It seems to me that there is no answer to this evidence unless the Polish witnesses are to be charged with having falsified it, and even then the fact remains that the Germans were willing to have an International Red Cross investigation which would surely have exposed them if they had done what the Russians claim that they did.

With regard to Starobjelsk, Poles from that camp who were sent to Pavlishchev Bor in the spring of 1940 testified that the camp had been completely cleared when their comrades were moved to an unknown destination, and according to the Soviet version the Polish prisoners at the time of the German invasion were no longer in the three original camps, but in camps to the west of Smolensk. It is therefore common ground to both the Soviet and Polish versions that none of the missing officers were in Starobjelsk when the Germans got there, and whatever the SS did there, it could have had no connection with the corpses found at Katyn.

G. F. HUDSON

Oxford, England

A Soviet Decree

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In order to rescue an innocent bystander from being hurt, I take the liberty of calling the attention of the reviewer of my book *Underground* (in the June number of COMMENTARY) to the fact that the "alleged Soviet decree, issued by Kalinin at the end of 1941, ordering the evacuation of Jews from the path of Germans," did not appear in a "pro-Soviet Yiddish book" but in a most authoritative study on the subject written by Moshe Kaganovich, who is in charge of the Central Historical Commission of the Union of Jewish Partisans in Italy. The quotation in dispute appears on page 188 of his highly praised book, *Participation of Jews in the Partisan Movement of Soviet Russia*, published by the Union of Jewish Partisans in 1948, in Rome, Italy.

Now, while I do not specialize in party labels, I have reason to believe that Moshe Kaganovich is a perfectly kosher Mapainik, and his book, according to the title page, was "edited by the Labor Zionist Committee for Relief and Rehabilitation Inc. in America (673 Broadway, New

York)," which, to my knowledge, no one has ever suspected of pro-Soviet leanings.

DR. JOSEPH TENENBAUM

New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Dr. Tenenbaum's letter confirms one of the points of my review of his book—his uncritical treatment of some of his source material. For despite Dr. Tenenbaum's facts on the editorial sponsorship of the book, it does suffer from a pro-Soviet bias. Kaganovich cites numerous cases of anti-Semitic acts and attitudes on the part of the Russian partisans. Yet he seems compelled to defend the Soviet Union's official position on anti-Semitism, using vague generalizations to rebut his own evidence. These appear on pp. 146, 160, 178, 187-188, 194, and elsewhere.

The critical reader of Kaganovich's book can distinguish between his facts and his wishful thinking—in which category the supposed Kalinin decree falls—and can separate the valid presentation from the invalid conclusions. Surely, it was not too much to ask this critical judgment also of Dr. Tenenbaum.

LUCY S. DAWIDOWICZ

New York City

The New Immigration Law

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I very much agree with Oscar Handlin (in the July issue) that the immigration fight has only begun. Equally I agree with him that the fight can be waged successfully only as a frontal attack on the national quotas system itself.

But I am sure that many who read Mr. Handlin's article will be all the more puzzled to understand why the reactionary McCarran bill became law by a vote of Congress overriding the President's veto. He gives entirely too much weight to McCarran's strategic position in Congress as an explanation. He does not give enough weight to two factors: the inadequate preparations of the proponents of the Humphrey-Lehman bill and the extent of the real and latent opposition to liberalization of immigration.

(1) Senators can do many things to arouse wide masses of the public in support of a bill they advocate. They can persuade friendly newspapers to publish series of informational articles well in advance of a vote on the bill. They can organize forces which will send speakers on the issue into thousands of labor union locals, church groups, and fraternal organizations. They can send out millions of mailing pieces under their Congressional franking privileges. They can badger opposing Con-